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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study that described the early stages of implementation of an external-reform model developed by a voluntary school-accrediting agency. The article centers on findings taken from 637 schools that participated in the program called Outcomes Accreditation (OA). The study examined the goals and expectations for improved student learning set by schools pursuing OA from 1987 through 1994. Three questions guided the research: What targets did schools select for improvement? Were the schools' expectations for improved learner outcomes guided by the accrediting agency's criteria for OA? and Do school characteristics and other factors make a difference in target identification or improvement expectations? The findings show that schools identified similar improvement targets from year to year. The targets that received attention in initial school-improvement efforts were constant, regardless of year, school characteristics, or state. For the schools participating in the study, a great deal of standardization already existed for what would first be improved in student learning. However, schools were flexible and amenable to policies that required them to change, though it took time to incorporate these policies into their intentions for improved student learning. The widespread acceptance of external guidelines moved the schools closer to having standardized expectations for improved quality with equity. (RJM)

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The Goals Of School Improvement: A View From The Field

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The Goals Of School Improvement: A View From The Field

by Anne K. Flanders

The message is clear to those inside and outside schools: schooling must change so it results in better outcomes for all students. Even while there is general agreement about what must change, how improved student learning successfully can be accomplished is still the subject of debate. Furthermore, reliable processes that support improved student learning need to be identified. Reliance on good intentions and assumptions about how schools should improve is risky and resource consuming.

A change in voluntary accrediting practices offered an opportunity to follow the implementation of an external reform model incorporating both school-level decision making regarding improvement and pressure to address commonly identified educational deficiencies. North Central Association (NCA) developed Outcomes Accreditation (OA) from research on school improvement, school effectiveness, and cognition and learning. The criteria for OA was formalized in 1992 after seven years of field testing. Schools are required to address the accrediting agency's loose guidelines for quality with equity and document improvements in student learning at the end of a three to five year cycle. However, this form of accreditation gives schools the responsibility for identifying what their own students needed to improve.

Six hundred thirty-seven schools participating in OA from 1987 through 1994 were examined. The contents of school improvement plans were analyzed to identify what was expected in these schools for improved learner outcomes. It was discovered that the schools selected similar learning targets regardless of year, school size, staff ratios, education level, governance, or state. In addition, over a period of three years, successive cohorts of schools gradually adapted their goal

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statements to include expectations of improved quality with equity that were required for accreditation.

The Problem

While there is no conclusive body of research confirming there is one best way of improving schools, some believe that schools cannot improve on their own. These persons feel schools must be directed in their efforts by outside agencies. School improvement policies set by these agencies can have the advantage of being equitable in their expectations for improving the academic achievement of all students. Those identified by individual schools have potential to enlarge already existing between-school differences in student learning. On the other hand, it is not clear that policy is the best lever for achieving improved learning outcomes. Many educators also believe that mandating school improvement without engaging the people in schools has unintended but negative effects on learning.

More information about alternatives to school improvement initiatives that attempt to take advantage of the strengths of centralizing and decentralizing is needed. This study was conducted to describe in part the early stages of the implementation of an external reform model developed by a voluntary school accrediting agency. In it the similarities and differences in targets and expectations of schools seeking accreditation based on improved learner outcomes are identified. Three questions guided this research:

- What targets did schools select for improvement?
- Were the school's expectations for improved learner outcomes guided by the accrediting agency's criteria for OA?
- Do school characteristics and other factors make a difference in target identification or improvement expectations?

Review of the Research

The reasons for educational reform and school improvement are solid. They are needed. Smith 1995, Drucker 1993 believe that most people can not find, organize, communicate, and act on knowledge effectively enough to meet the demands of today's workplace. In fact, Schlectly (1997) fixes the percentage of the population that currently meets high enough expectations to perform these tasks at 20%. As a result, they and others in business, policy, and education predict that productivity in the service sector and in technological development will suffer.

It is not surprising that there is agreement in educational policy circles to improve the quality and the equitable distribution of learning (Ravitch 1995, Tyack and Cuban 1995, Smith 1995). Furthermore, educational improvement is within reach. What is known about academic achievement in other developed nations and what is being discovered about learning through research in cognitive science clearly indicates that American students can do better (Elmore 1996, Ravitch 1995).

From this agreement, unprecedented activity has begun to set standards that will result in the improvement of schooling outcomes (Lewis 1997). However, the Department of Education (Lewis 1997) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT 1997) report that progress in the development of educational standards has been incremental and varies by state. AFT's (1997) critique of state-level efforts reveals several concerns about the quality of standards being set in 49 of 50 states. First is a fear that these standards will not address the "core areas" - mathematics, science, social sciences, and English. Second, that the standards identified will not be leveled or subject specific resulting in further nonstandardization of learning content. Finally, they will not control the 60-80% of curricular content AFT estimates is needed to ensure uniformity between schools.

Despite a strong showing of support for rigorous educational standards not all educators agree that they can improve student learning. Biddle (1997) thinks assumptions about the equalizing effects of standards actually divert policymakers' attention from real problems that are associated with school funding and child poverty. In addition, Eisner (1995) predicts they will further distract people from paying attention to what really is needed in their schools.

Furthermore, the assumption that these standards will improve school outcomes for students is further weakened by research on student achievement. Based on his analysis of student achievement, Jencks (1972) suggested over two decades ago that the largest share of academic achievement is attributable to students' background factors, not schools. In support, others researchers Berliner and Biddle (1995), have connected students' socioeconomic status to learning through the persistent association of lower academic achievement with the conditions of poverty. Faced with these results some educators believe that it is foolish to expect schools to take responsibility for educational outcomes that are the results of social and cultural influences (Berliner and Biddle 1995, Goodlad 1994). However, Goodlad (1994) and others also recognize the research on effective schooling demonstrating that schools can alter some of the selecting and sorting processes resulting in lower outcomes for disadvantaged students.

Perhaps the real issue some educators have with common educational standards is inflated expectations for school reform or educational improvement. Research conducted on school improvement demonstrates that improved student achievement is complex. It requires more than a single standard about what is taught or to whom it is taught can accomplish. Elmore (1996) and McLaughlin (1987) are among those who have observed that educational improvement is the outcome of several interrelated factors. Foremost in their opinion are: a focus on

improving student learning, the use of networks of educators to support the change, mindfulness of the content and the process of changing, and the allowance of systemic adaptation to the pressure of change and schools' reaction.

Based on what is known about school improvement, it appears that professional educational organizations may be especially well suited to supporting school reform initiatives. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) and Wagner (1993) are among those who have suggested that these organizations have the advantage over governmental policy bodies in supporting change in schools and accommodating school differences. Many of these organizations incorporate a focus on educational improvement, negotiate goals with their membership rather than impose them, and use networks in their membership to span the perspectives of different educational roles and organizations. Furthermore, most have begun educational improvement processes directed at improving student learning (Elmore 1996, Wagner, 1993).

However, the effectiveness of educational improvement efforts including professional agency collaboration needs further study to verify they actually contribute to improving learning Unfortunately, little has been published that might indicate what educators involved in these efforts intend to improve about student learning in their own schools. Therefore, an important initial step in gathering this information will be to identify what is selected for improvement under the loose criteria and minimal direction supplied by professional organizations.

Purpose of This Study

This investigation is part of a larger project following the initiation and implementation of NCA OA. It was conducted to identify the targets and expectations for improved student learning set by schools pursuing OA from 1987 through 1994. First, the contents of goals from 637 school improvement plans

were analyzed. Targets and expectations for learning improvement were identified for 2870 goals. Second, yearly, school governance, size, staffing ratios, level (elementary, junior high-middle school, high school), and state comparisons were made to find out if these factors were associated with similarities or differences in target selection or expectations for improving student learning.

Subjects

The subjects of this study were the 637 schools who chose to pursue NCA OA between 1987 and 1994. Criteria for schools' sets of improvement goals were not formalized by NCA until 1992. Therefore, OA plans taken from schools participating in field testing prior to 1992 are treated a single group. Table 1 provides a yearly breakdown of the number of schools submitting plans, the states in the NCA region represented, the average number of goals per plan, and the total number of goals examined for each year and field testing.

Table 1 Yearly Breakdown Of OA Participation

	Number of Schools	Different States	Average Goals/Plan	Goals Submitted
Pre-1992	68	14	4.3	293
1992	165	17	4.7	772
1993	320	17	4.7	1496
1994	84	1	4.3	360
TOTAL	637	20*	4.5	2921

* *In all twenty states had schools seeking candidacy during this study, though several states participated some years and not others.*

None of the schools were selected randomly to participate in this investigation. They became the subjects of this study either because they chose to participate in field testing or because they elected to pursue OA from 1992 through 1994. The pre-1992 schools are the entire population of OA candidate schools receiving accreditation in 1993 and 1994. They began their improvement processes between 1987 and 1991. The 1992 and 1993 schools are the entire cohort seeking approval for initiating OA candidacy. The 1994 sets of improvement goals are a sample of those submitted that year. They include only the goals from a one state in the NCA region.

The improvement plans come from schools that vary in size, location, staff to student ratios, education levels, and governance. Included in the sample are schools from 19 different states and one overseas Department of Defense region, with levels of schooling spanning pre-school through grade 12, and differing school sizes and staffing ratios, and public and private governance. Forty five percent of the schools were high schools, 23% middle or junior high schools, and 32 % elementary schools. The average enrollment in these schools was 710 students, and staffing averaged 49 full-time professional staff members (FTE). When these figures are compared to those for US schools in 1993 (DES 1993) enrollments are 40% larger and FTEs 47% greater than national averages. However, the student-to-staff ratio of 14.6 is close to the 1993 average of 14.7, and the ratio of private-to-public schools (8-to-92) matched that of the states from which the schools came.

Methods

NCA does not tell schools what to improve when they choose OA. The improvement targets are the school's own, selected on data about students' current

performance. However, constraints in the form of criteria for school improvement plans are in place. They influence expectations for outcomes in the school's goals.

To meet OA guidelines a school submits a set of goals that forms a coordinated plan and focuses on student learning, distribution of expectations for improvement among all students, establishment of expectations for "complex behaviors" (see Appendix I), address of higher level thinking, and involvement of the school's staff (NCA 1994). During 1992 and 1993 it was recommended that improvement plans include five goals; three addressing cognitive outcomes and two affective (NCA 1992). Three to five years are taken to complete improvements once plans have been endorsed by peer visitation to schools and peer reviewers at the NCA Annual Meeting in Chicago.

Copies of school improvement plans submitted for peer review were collected at the annual meeting of the accrediting agency in 1992, 1993, and 1994. Characteristics of each goal contained in these plans were identified and coded. Exemplars of coding can be found in Appendix II. Exemplars were submitted to various groups of educators in the NCA region, and the coding was found to be reliable (Wick and Gose, 1994).

The ten categories used for coding expected outcomes include seven complex behaviors that were identified by NCA (see Appendix I), in addition to expectations for the achievement of learning indicators, process implementation, or organizational outcomes unrelated to learning (Wick and Sarterfiel 1992). The specific curricular or extra-cocurricular area targeted for improvement in each goal was identified. The 19 target categories used were established through a survey of the goals submitted in 1992 and 1993 (Flanders 1993). Because NCA uses measurability, higher level skills, level of learning, focus on student learning, and equity as indicators of improved quality, these factors were used in the same way in

coding. Therefore, the agreement or lack of agreement the goals had with criteria for quality was also coded.

Descriptive and comparative analyses were made on the basis of several factors including year (pre-1992, 1992, 1993, and 1994), state, governance, school level, size, and staffing ratios. Descriptions and comparisons were used to address four questions. These questions were:

- Do schools identify the same target areas for improvement and expectations for learning outcomes from year to year?
- Did the content of goals change to adapt to OA criteria for quality with equity?
- Which OA criteria seemed most easy to adapt to goal statements?
- Do school characteristics make a difference in target selection or expectations for improvement?

Results

Do schools identify the same target areas for improvement and expectations for learning outcomes from year to year?

OA candidates participating in field testing prior to 1992 through the 1994 sample indicated their preferences for curricular improvement by selection of targets. The majority of goals examined targeted language arts, values related to learning, or tools and processes that support learning (see Table 2). Twenty-five percent of the goals submitted targeted language arts, another 28% targeted student values related to learning, and 25% targeted processes and tools that support learning. Of the remaining 22% of the goals, 11% addressed other content areas and 11% could not be linked to student learning. Similar preferences for target selection were found in the 1994 sample. The percent targeting language arts, values supporting learning, or tools and processes supporting learning in 1994

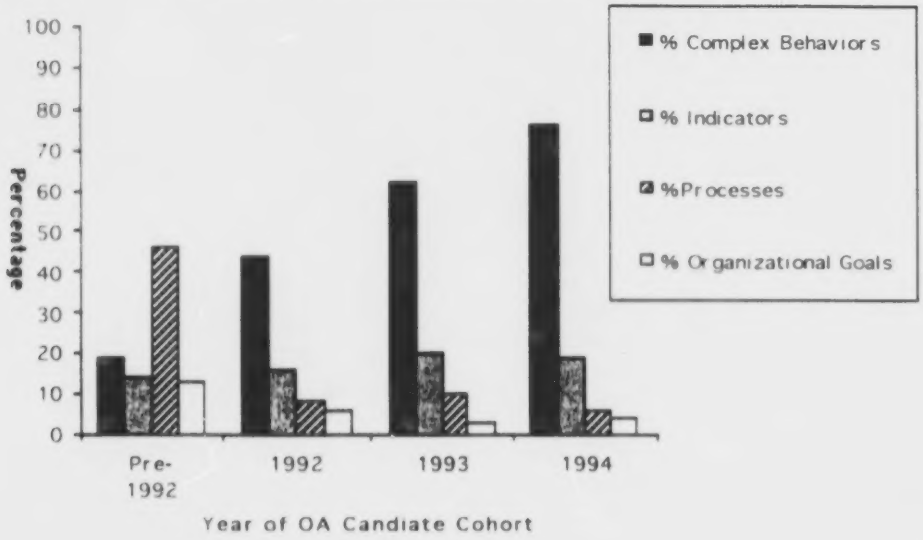
varied no more than 3% from those in Table 2 for the pre-1992 through 1993 schools.

Table 2 Percent Of All Improvement Goals Targeting Specific Curricular And Co/Extra-Curricular Areas For Improvement From 1987 Through 1993

I. Goals for subject areas		36%
	Language arts	25%
	Social sciences	3%
	Mathematics	3%
	Sciences	2%
	Fine arts	2%
	Health/physical education	1%
	Foreign Languages	0%
	Manual Arts	0%
II. Goals for student values related to learning		28%
	Socialization/rule following	16%
	Self-esteem	8%
	Social contribution/service	3%
	Autonomy/independence	1%
III. Goals for tools and processes related to learning		25%
	Problem solving strategies	11%
	Study skills	11%
	Use of technology	3%
	Creative thinking	0%

Expectations for improvements that were in compliance with OA criteria initially were low but increased over time (see Figure 1). Throughout the study schools also identified indicators of learning (improved testing outcomes or counts of student behaviors), implementation of learning processes, and organizational goals for improvement. Goals that were unclear or unrelated to expectations for student improvement virtually had disappeared by 1993. Prior to 1992, only 11% of all goals stated what students would do (complex behaviors) as a result of improvement efforts. In contrast, 75% of the 1994 sample's goals had expectations for improved complex behaviors. The previous year, only 54% of all goals from the state that was used for the 1994 sample had expectations for complex behaviors.

Figure 1 All Goals By Type Of Outcome, Pre-1992 - 1994



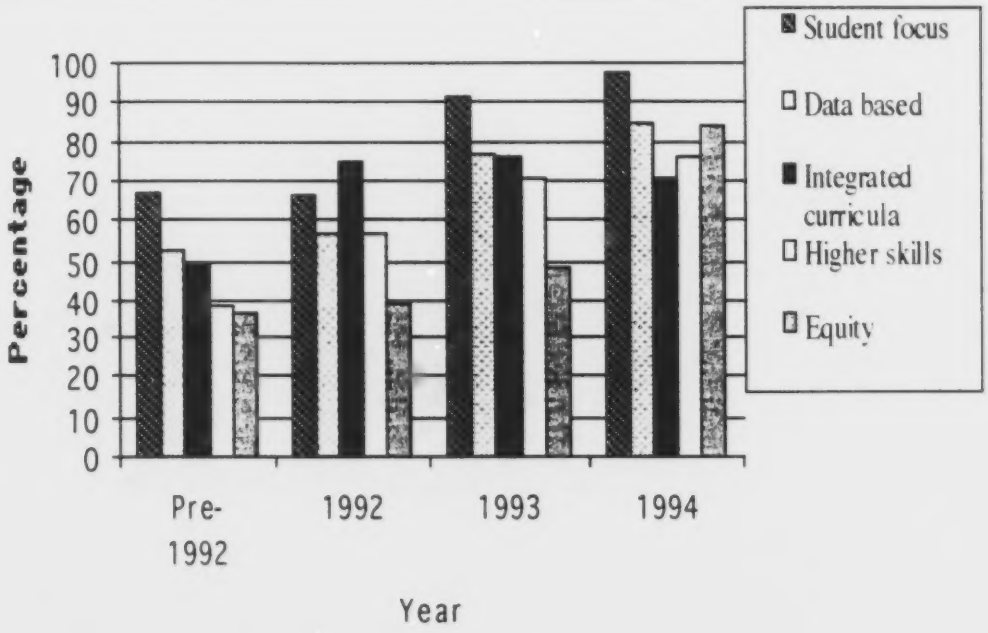
Like targets, expectations for student learning focused on three complex behaviors (see Appendix I). Thirty-six percent of all goal statements set expectations for students to improve the responsibility to "caring for self and others." Another 23% looked for enhanced communication, and 21% anticipated improvements in "problem solving and creative thinking." Complex behaviors seldom indicated for improvement were: making, fixing, growing things (1%); impact of sciences and technology (2%); global implications for the social sciences (4%) and making mathematical decisions using shape, pattern, and size (6%).

Did the content of goals change to adapt to OA criteria for quality with equity?

Prior to 1992, goal statements in school improvement plans exhibited both equity and quality as defined for OA about 12% of the time. The percent of goals addressing criteria set in OA guidelines improved by 1994 (see Figure 2). Equity was the last criteria to be integrated. By 1994 equity was evident in 84% of the goal statements from the sample state. The previous year only 54% of all goal

statements from this state had equitable expectations. The other criteria were also evident in most goals the last year of this study. Ninety-seven percent of all goals focused on student learning, 87% were selected through analysis of data on student performance, 71% integrated curricular areas (complex activities), and 76% percent targeted higher level skills.

Figure 2 Percentage Of Goal Statements With Quality Indicators



Which OA criteria seemed most easy to use in goal statements?

As can be seen in Figure 2, schools improved in the use of all the OA criteria with each passing year. However, some criteria was integrated more rapidly than others (see Table 3). Integrating skills and knowledge and targeting higher level skills as outcomes improved the most during the early stages of OA development and implementation. Focus on student learning

and measurability increased more than other criteria between 1992 and 1993. However, the greatest improvement overall was in targeting higher level skills and while the least was seen in equity.

Table 3 Increase In Criteria Used In School Improvement Goals

Criteria	Pre-1992 to 1992	1992 to 1993	TOTAL
Equity	3%	9%	12%
Student focus	1%	23%	25%
Data based	5%	20%	25%
Integration of curricular areas	26%	1%	27%
Higher skills	19%	14%	33%

Do school characteristics make a difference in target selection or expectations for improvement?

Target and expectation selections were compared on the basis of school characteristics including year, level, enrollment, staffing ratios, governance, and state. Correlations between percentages of target areas selected and outcomes indicated for improvement were strong (see Table 4) regardless of year, level, enrollment staffing ratios, and governance. However, Correlations between the percentage of each expectation identified in goals by state were weak.

Comparisons were then made for significant differences by state in target selection and expectations. Based on these comparisons, no significant difference was found between states in percentage of target areas selected [F (19, 380) = 0.067, $p > .05$]. However, when the percentage of outcomes indicated for each complex behavior, indicators of learning, implementation of learning processes,

and organizational outcomes were compared by state they were significant [F (19, 200) = - 5.23 , p < .001]. Because some states submitted very few school plans (less than 10) during this study, they were eliminated and a second analysis of variance was conducted on the remaining 14 states. The findings were significant for differences in expectations between states [F (13, 140) = - 7.49 , p < .001]. However, once again, no significant difference was found for target selections [F (13, 247) = 0.039, p > .05].

Table 4 Correlations For Improvement

	Targets Selected (df=9)	Expectations Identified (df=17)
Levels		
Elementary /Jr. High	0.90**	0.91**
Elementary/High School	0.93**	0.93**
Jr. High/Middle School	0.97**	0.98**
Enrollment quartiles [a]		
first and second	0.94**	0.95**
first and third	0.94**	0.95**
first and fourth	0.95**	0.93**
second and third	0.96**	0.95**
second and fourth	0.95**	0.95**
third and fourth	0.95**	0.95**
Students/FTE quartiles [b]		
first and second	0.94**	0.97**
first and third	0.87**	0.96**
first and fourth	0.80**	0.91**
second and third	0.95**	0.97**
second and fourth	0.94**	0.94**
third and fourth	0.96**	0.96**
Governance		
Public and Nonpublic	0.75*	0.97**

* significant at the .01 level for a nondirectional test

** significant at the .001 level for a nondirectional test

[a] Mean enrollments for each quartile are: first, 413 students; second, 583 students; third, 813 students; and fourth, 873 students.

[b] Mean students per professional staff member (FTE) for each quartile are: first, 10 students; second, 12 students; third, 16 students; and fourth, 19 students.

Conclusions and Discussion

Do schools identify the same target areas for improvement and expectations for learning outcomes from year to year?

Schools identified similar improvement targets from year to year. The average school improvement plan had four or five goals targeting language arts , values related to learning, and processes supporting learning. Most of the values-oriented goals were focused on improving student behavior in schools. The processes supporting learning were split evenly between problem solving strategies and study skills (information collection and organization or inductive thinking). Often, plans with five or more goals had at least two goals for language arts (reading, writing, or combinations of reading, writing, speaking, and listening). About 40% of the plans also included a goal for another subject area (mathematics, science, social studies, or fine arts).

The similarity of targets in school improvement plans may have been due in part to external pressures from superordinate agencies. In addition, schools also used similar sources for achievement data and took similar fist steps that may have been the most logical for initiation of student learning outcomes improvement under OA criteria. Regardless, the result was a healthy degree of standardization in school improvement plans rather than variation.

Patterns of similar target-area selection by schools from the same state or same school district were strong. They could be seen in OA school candidacy materials and were verified in a survey of NCA state directors in 1993. As a result, of state or school district influence some targets always were selected though never others. School district policy also was used to justify target selection. Often, schools from certain districts would reiterate the same goals, use the same

information as resources, or have the same resource person select and analyze their data for target selection.

The educators participating in OA processes were required to use data-based decision making by accreditation guidelines. From their documentation, it was evident that they used similar resources to describe student achievement in the school and select targets. Virtually every school used standardized testing to justify their target selection. Surveys of staff, students, parents, and community were also popular sources of information about perceptions of student performance. In addition, in states where performance testing was mandated this testing was featured regularly in the school's self-study description and justification of targets.

Admittedly, the goals that schools identified for their first cycle of school improvement did not cover everything that policymakers or researchers have identified for improvement. The lack of goals for mathematics, sciences, social sciences, foreign languages, health and physical education, and the arts is worrisome. However, these subject areas may be the focus of later OA improvement cycles.

For several reasons it is too early to speculate whether educators involved in OA are failing to address these areas. First, this study concentrated only on the initial cycle of schools' improvement efforts and OA is meant to sustain continual improvement through successive cycles. It is unlikely that schools could repeat goals for things they have already improved because they would have difficulty documenting growth or change in student learning. Secondly, a single OA cycle probably is insufficient for covering everything that is in need of educational improvement. Finally, the subject areas that were not selected for improvement targets were not ignored by schools. They continued to be taught and learned as part of the regular mandated course work for students. However, they were not

singled out for additional efforts to improve their teaching and student learning outcomes in this cycle.

Regardless, the goals schools select for improvement in the future will bear watching. If mathematics, sciences, and social sciences are not indicated for improvement in successive cycles of OA, intervention is needed. The inclusion of school-related values is also a question. Until 1994, NCA recommended OA school improvement plans contain two affective goals. No recommendation was made after that, so the number of goals stressing values that support learning may have declined in plans.

It was clear that schools could indicate what would be improved but they did not identify what students would do as a result of their improvement efforts at the beginning of this study. However, by the end of this investigation expectations for improvement were becoming standardized among schools seeking OA candidacy. This will be discussed more thoroughly in the next section.

Did the content of goals change to adapt to OA criteria for quality with equity?

Expectations for the outcomes of student learning changed in school goal statements. The goals identified by schools beginning OA were increasingly more valuable as a basis for improvement. They demonstrated growing compliance with OA criteria for educational quality (use of higher level skills and knowledge) with equity each year. However, it took about three years for most goal statements in school improvement plans to reflect these guidelines.

I feel it will take longer to implement these guidelines in school improvement than it did to include them in the goals. Therefore, it will be important to verify the outcomes of school improvement efforts made by the OA candidates initiating their improvement cycles from 1992-1994. Obviously, proof

that the effort was worth it and verification that a professional organization can be effective in mediating and directing change will come with these results.

In addition, some of the criteria will probably be more difficult to implement in teaching, as some were harder to use in the simple activity of writing goal statements. However, there is evidence of organizational learning within the accrediting agency that should contribute to reducing some of the difficulty of subsequent school efforts. The capacity to address OA criteria was not lost from one cohort of schools to the next. Successive cohorts did not have to recreate their understanding of the criteria. Because of this, each cohort of OA schools was able to build on past work and improve on their predecessor cohort's use of OA guidelines in improvement goals. This suggests that the accrediting agency's members retained and shared knowledge about the application of criteria that encourage its evolution of use in practice.

Which OA criteria seemed most easy to adapt to goal statements?

A focus on student learning was the easiest criteria for schools to use; equity was the hardest. Because a focus on student learning is congruent with the work of schooling it may not have taken much of a leap to accommodate. I believe that the school organizations in this study OA had greater difficulty with the OA concept of equity because it requires of them a shift from common practice and accepted beliefs. Essentially their understanding of equity had to be expanded from one that accepted equal access to schools (even though different treatments and expectations were acceptable) to include common expectations for student outcomes.

It seems apparent to me that equity was improved in these schools as a result of this shift. In addition, equity also improved between these schools

because participants standardized their expectations for learning improvement according to OA guidelines. However, I do not think that standardizing expectations for improvement within and between schools will be enough to overcome the more significant effects of socioeconomic disadvantages. Differences in resources for facilities, materials, and teacher qualifications are not addressed by these efforts, nor are the environmental stress factors experienced by children in poverty. Ultimately, governments will need to deal with most of the inequality between schools that affects learning outcomes because they have the base to change things that lie outside the school's control.

Do school characteristics make a difference in target selection or expectations for improvement?

The school's state made a difference in expectations for improvement. School characteristics of size, staffing, education level, and governance did not. The influence of the state was reflected through the rate of school adaptation to the criteria. Sometimes it was harder for schools to integrate state mandates with OA criteria. If the state set priorities for improvement, these were reflected in expectations or targets. When states had expectations for improved testing outcomes, indicators were commonly used by the state's schools for goals.

At other times schools indicated they selected OA criteria as a way to manage external pressures from mandated reforms. NCA state directors also verified this in a 1993 survey. About one-half said that schools in their states used OA as a process to deal with state rules and regulations for school improvement. A quarter of the directors also agreed that state mandates for school improvement interfered with school improvement processes under OA.

Summary

The targets that received attention in initial school improvement efforts that concentrated on learner outcomes were constant, regardless of year, school characteristics, or state. At least for the schools participating in this study, a great deal of standardization already existed for what should first be improved in student learning. However, schools also were flexible and amenable to policies that required them to change, though it took time to incorporate these policies into their intentions for improved student learning.

In the beginning states made a difference in which criteria were used for expected learning outcomes though this difference was minimized over time. Regardless of the state, schools could take advantage of the practices of previous OA participants in the NCA region. The necessity for each cohort to relearn incorporation of criteria in goal statements or overcome obstacles arising from other policy bodies was reduced. As a result of the widespread acceptance of external guidelines moved these schools closer to having standardized expectations for improved quality with equity.

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Appendix I

Complex Behaviors Identified for Student Learning by NCA_

1. Technology's impact and its basis in science (science, technology, and conservation)
2. Making decisions using quantity, shape, location and pattern (math using numbers, patterns, and shapes)
3. Problem solving and critical thinking (appropriate for all curricular areas)
4. Communicating (reading, writing, speaking, listening, non-verbal, using fine arts).
5. Caring for self and others (social or team work needs, goal setting, study skills or habits)
6. Making, growing, and fixing things (a trade area using hands and equipment, hands on)
7. Global implications of the social studies (social studies, citizenship, cultural awareness)

NCA, A Focus on Student Success: A Handbook for Schools Seeking Outcomes Accreditation, 1992

Appendix II

Improvement Target Areas And Exemplars Taken From OA School Improvement Plans

GOAL CATEGORIZATION BY LEARNING TARGETS

Following are examples of several goals classified by their primary academic target.

- Language arts:
  "Students will demonstrate ability to comprehend the main and subordinate ideas in written work and select appropriate ways to communicate these ideas."

- Math:
  "Students will solve complex math problems involving several steps and operations."

- Problem-solving and critical thinking skills:
  "Students will improve their ability to solve, analyze, and evaluate problems using logical steps and appropriate resources."

- Study skills:
  "Students will assume responsibility for their learning through preparation, use of timelines, application of inquiry skills, cooperation with others in group tasks, and the development of personal standards for the quality of their work."

- Social sciences:
  "Children will share knowledge of their heritage, language, culture, and life experiences."

CODING FOR QUALITY AND EQUITY

Expectations for Outcomes

For the purpose of this study, a target-area goal was considered a student learning outcome (SLO) if it focused on skills or knowledge used by the students. Therefore, complex behaviors, indicators, and processes were all considered SLOs. Goals that were either unclear or focused on targets unrelated to student learning were not SLOs. Following are three examples of goals from school improvement plans that can be classified as student learning outcomes:

- Complex behavior:
  "Students will increase their knowledge and ability to use various technology as tools for learning, information management, and communication."

- Indicator of learning:
  "Reading comprehension scores will improve."

- Implementation of a process supporting learning
  "Students will make portfolios in preparation for application to higher education or future employment."

Goals that do not address the use of knowledge and skills include indicators, processes, outcomes for parents, teachers, and organizations. Student learning goals for two different complex behavior strands follow.

- Communication:
  "In all subjects students will demonstrate the ability to produce written documents in standard English (mechanics, usage, spelling)"

- Caring for self and others:
  "Students will make responsible choices for their social and emotional health".

An indicator targets a narrow outcome for improvement through test scores, grades, or change in a count of student behaviors (absenteeism, library material checkout, discipline notices, counselor contacts, survey responses, teacher observations). Indicators do not provide in-depth information about how useful this is for students, but they usually imply which complex behavior the school wishes to improve. Two examples of indicators are: "Scores on weekly spelling tests will improve." and "Students will be able to restate feelings and responses in non-judgmental terms."

Process goals are related to student learning, but they fall short of describing students' use of complex behaviors. Like indicators, they are an important part of school improvement processes but are not precise targets for students' use of knowledge and skills. Two examples of process goals are:

"Students will increase self esteem through goal setting." and "Girls will be encouraged to take part in higher level math and science courses."

Goals for school or organizational outcomes are related to improvement of the school but, unlike indicators and processes, are not directly connected to student learning. Therefore, it is even more difficult to tie them to the active use of skills and knowledge by students. Two examples of organizational outcomes are: "School employees will feel positive, empowered, and their accomplishments will be recognized." and "Parents and community members will become significantly involved in the achievement of vision, goals, and objectives."

Goals that are unclear don't stand on their own as explanations for students' use of knowledge and skills. Therefore, it is impossible to determine whether the school is attempting to improve something of value. Three examples of unclear goals that indicate target areas relating to complex behaviors follow.

"Children will say positive things about each other."

"Students will demonstrate rational and irrational thinking."

"Art - all areas and all techniques."

Goal Categorization by the Level of Learning Being Addressed

Each goal also was classified by the level of student learning it described. Three categorizations were used: integrated learning requiring active use of skills and knowledge, skill or concept acquisition requiring recall, and unclear. Examples of goals follow.

- Integrated learning:

  "Students will apply their knowledge of historical, economic, political, and geographic patterns to analyze five themes in

American History: war, peace, expansion, depression, and globalization."

"Students will master the use of tools to construct and repair objects they use in everyday life."

"Students will develop the ability to analyze problems in various situations and curricular areas through the use of concrete mathematical models."

- Skill or content acquisition:

"Students will use "I" statements rather than engage in name calling."

"The writer will use proper punctuation on written assignments and tests in English."

"Students will locate and interpret information using developmentally appropriate resource materials."

- Unclear:

"Students will understand the consequences of their actions."

"The student's self-esteem will improve."

"80% of the students will increase written communication skills 80% of the time by achieving at or above grade level norms on portfolio assignments."

"Students will learn to teach themselves."

Goal Categorization for Measurability

Goals that are clearly measurable in terms of student learning outcomes describe the active use of knowledge and skills that can be observed and recorded, perceived and reported, or documented by artifacts. The following are examples of clearly measurable goals written by OA candidacy applicants:

> "Students will use technological resources to improve oral and written communications in all academic areas."
>
> "Students will demonstrate self-discipline to improve their social skills specifically when: a. interacting together , b. accepting responsibility, c. coping with criticism."
>
> "Children will demonstrate the ability to work cooperatively in diverse groupings for various activities related to the school curriculum and its community."

If a goal cannot be authenticated by observable use of student knowledge or skills and the school supplied no data justifying its selection, it is considered immeasurable. The following four examples are of goals with measurement problems.

> "Students will reflect higher morals on the moral response surveys."
>
> "Students will become more responsible by increasing attendance and reducing late homework assignments."
>
> "Students will follow rules; Students will become successful later in life."
>
> "Citizenship proficiency scores will increase to 85%."

Goal Categorization for Equity

Within-school equity requires that all students be given the same expectations for improved learning. Therefore, equitable goals address improved learning outcomes for all of the school's students. The three goals that follow are equitable because they apply to every student in the school.

> "All students will demonstrate the ability to vary their writing style including vocabulary and sentence structure for different readers and different purposes."

"Students will understand and demonstrate an acceptance of individual in social and academic situations."

" Students will build the skills they need to become independent, life-long learners who are able use inquiry to acquire the knowledge they need."

Goals that specifically include or inadvertently exclude persons or groups of students have equity issues. If a target for a goal is not applicable to all of the school's students then it is not considered equitable. Following are examples for each type of coding for inequitable expectations.

- Academic achievement:
  "Ninth and tenth grade students will show an increase in the numbers of students passing classes."

- Socioeconomic status
  "Free lunch students will show an increase in achievement scores."

- Student behavior:
  "Student incidents of cheating will be reduced."